



# United States Secret Service

## Online Auction Fraud – Tips to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Online auction fraud is a sophisticated scheme that relies on the increasing popularity of e-commerce marketplaces, such as Craigslist and eBay. Using these sites, fraudsters post false advertisements for merchandise that does not exist. Then, using a multitude of convincing methods, these cyber-criminals persuade victims to send money for the non-existent goods. Here are some tips to keep in mind while shopping online.

- **G**oogle the seller's name, email address, and phone number looking for discrepancies in information.
- **I**nvestigate the seller by examining the feedback and the seller's history.
- **B**e suspicious of a seller using multiple email accounts or phone numbers to communicate.
- **F**raudsters will commonly impersonate U.S. service members overseas as a strategy to avoid regular communication with buyers and to provide a reasoning why an item is substantially cheaper than the market value.
- **I**f the price seems too good to be true, it's probably a scam.
- **I**f possible, purchase items online using your credit card versus debit card because charges can be disputed if fraud occurs.
- **N**ever complete a purchase outside of the auction site methodology. Fraudsters will encourage the buyer to complete the transaction "offline" to avoid fees and will attempt to persuade the buyer to purchase the item via wire transfer.
- **I**f an escrow service is used, ensure that it is legitimate.
- **B**e suspicious of any seller who insists on the buyer using pre-paid gift cards for payment.
- **N**ever photograph a gift card and send to the seller "as proof" of payment.
- **A**sk the seller about when delivery can be expected and obtain tracking numbers for shipments.
- **N**ever provide your social security number or any other personally identifiable information (PII) to the seller.
- **V**ictims should be encouraged to file a complaint with their local police department, the FTC at [ftc.gov/complaint](https://www.ftc.gov/complaint), or the Internet Crimes Complaint Center at [ic3.gov/complaint](https://www.ic3.gov/complaint).

